From my Inbox: One student's crusade against my cell phone policy

Dear Professor T------,

I am writing this email to you in the hopes that you will not be offended, but I feel the need to express my unhappiness about one of your class policies after certain things happened in class today (I think you know what I am referring to). I am talking about your policy regarding cell phones in class. I understand that you do not like students to use them (you say it all the time!) but I find your policy to be WAY harsh and I am not just saying this because you yelled at me today for using mine. The fact is, I did not intend to use my phone during class but I received a very important text from my boyfriend about a personal matter that I needed to respond to right away because he and I going through a hard time right now. You need to understand that sometimes things happen and we have to respond because that is life. I know that rules are rules but I think you were very disrespectful of me when you spoke to me the way you did in front of the entire class in the way that you did. Before today you were of my favorite teachers here but after your this I am sorry but I will have to rethink that belief.

I hope you will reconsider your cell phone policy for other students who deserve to be respected and not ridiculed as you did with me today. We are paying a lot of money to go here and teachers like you do not make it easier.

Very Sincerely,
Brittany R--------

Dear Brittany,

I hope you will reconsider your cell phone policy for other students who deserve to be respected and not ridiculed as you did with me today. We are paying a lot of money to go here and teachers like you do not make it easier.

***
Thanks for your email. Like all teachers, I’m always eager to receive feedback from students, whether their suggestions are about my curriculum, classroom policies or fashion choices. On behalf of teachers everywhere, I salute your directness and honesty.

You should know that my cell phone policy has gone through several adjustments over the past several years, based on my experience with students. You know, at first I didn’t even have a policy about phones in my classes. Can you believe that? The idea that a student would allow his/her phone to ring during a class session, let alone use said phone, was unthinkable! And inconceivable! Surely, I thought, any decent person with a modicum of awareness of his/her surroundings knows better than to allow such a blatant disruption! We live in a civilized nation, do we not?

That was before I had a student allow her Kanye West ring tone to go off at full volume in the middle of a class. I was leading a discussion about the use of logical fallacies in famous political speeches. The ring tone was West’s tour de force collaboration with Daft Punk entitled Stronger (“You know how long I been on ya/ Since Prince was on Appollonia/ Since OJ had Isotoners/ Don’t say that I never told ya”). Such an awesome song, right?

However: while the song is a true new millenium classic of a humble musical icon, it didn’t contribute to our discourse that day. I was shocked that the student allowed her phone to go off. I was even more shocked when she answered the phone and proceeded to have a conversation with the caller about where they should go for lunch later. Right there in the middle of class. While I waited. With the vein in my forehead starting to throb in anger.

So I revised my policy again. It read: “Please avoid letting cell phones go off in class, to minimize disruption.” Very non-confrontational, I felt. I mean, I said please and everything.

But then I started noticing that my students were looking down into their laps frequently during class. At first I just thought those students were just oddly curious about their post-adolescent development, gazing down at themselves in wonder. After all, most Freshmen are in their late teens, possibly still learning about their bodies. Sure, it’s inappropriate to stare intently into one’s own groin in a classroom, but better than staring into the groin of one’s neighbor, am I right?

And I realized that those same students who were staring downwards also seemed to be experiencing a strange neon glow originating from their laps and illuminating their faces. It concerned me: were they actually aliens preparing to shed their human flesh shells and emerge as brilliantly lit, amorphous creatures like in the classic mid-80s film Cocoon?

I later discovered that, while students were technically adhering to my policy by not allowing their phones to make noise, they were instead texting, albeit silently, under their desks. And weren’t smart enough to turn the brightness of their screen displays down.

I don’t mind telling you that was a difficult day for me, Brittany.

Shocked, I was. Absolutely shocked and appalled that students would find such a devious way to use their phones in class. Because you see, fair Brittany, the real point here is that, when you’re in class, you really should be focusing on that class’ agenda, rather than texting friends about where to do for lunch, or what color nail polish will be appropriate for the party next weekend, or whether or not Josh was lying when he said never hooked up with Ashley during Winter Break, which is such a lie because everyone knows Ashley is such a total slut.

So I revised my policy again. It read: “Please do not allow your cell phone to disrupt class proceedings. Doing so is disrespectful to both the teacher, and your fellow students.”

I felt this was direct. And polite. Hell, I kept please in there.

It didn’t work. Students insisted on peeking at their phones in their backpacks. They kept trying to text. And every once in a while, their phones would sound off in the middle of class. When that happened, I would halt the proceedings, search for the student with the guilty look on his/her face, present my Expression of Extreme Disapproval and wait for them to quail, feel appropriately chagrined, turn their phone off, and return their attention to the class session. It usually worked.

But I still felt the need to revise my policy once more. My subsequent statement about cell phones is the one currently articulated in your course syllabus, which I reiterated to everyone on the first day of the semester: “Please turn off all cell phones before entering this room. Leave them off until class is done. Do not check your phone during class. Do not text during class. Do not look at your phone during class. Consider this fair warning; violating this policy will have an immediate impact on your in-class participation grade.”

I do not know how to be clearer than this, Brittany. And you’ll note that I still say goddamn please.

I’m sorry you feel I showed you some disrespect today when I asked you to put your phone away. From my perspective, I was quite polite. I asked if you were texting. You look up from the bright, otherwordly purplish glow of your phone and
said, "No." I said, "Brittany, I’m certain that you are. Rather than lie about it, just put the damn phone away." You revealed that you did in fact have a phone in your lap, which you turned off. You exhaled audibly through your nose, and mumbled something I couldn’t quite make out. An abject apology, surely.

Perhaps I shouldn’t have used profane language when I addressed you. But I didn't think the word "damn" was inappropriate, considering how often I hear you walk into class while in the middle of a phone conversation, littering your own side of the dialogue with language that would make a sailor call home and apologize to his mother. You often seem to be speaking to a romantic partner on your phone when you arrive. Earlier this week, your final sign-off before hanging up was: "Oh yea? Well Fuck you, Shane. Fuck you with a fucking nine-foot pole. I hope your dick shrivels up and falls off."

Perhaps the "personal matter" you were texting about in class today had something to do with Shane's medical problem. If his dick had in fact shriveled up and fallen off, and he needed you to take him to see a doctor, I must admit that would qualify as both a personal matter, and an emergency situation that couldn’t wait.

For now, I will be keeping my cell phone policy as is, even though it will knock me off your Favorite Teacher list. But again, I thank you for your constructive advice. I do hope you won’t hesitate to suggest other ways that my class could be improved. I look forward to hearing from you.

Please give Shane my best wishes for a full recovery.

Sincerely,

T-----------

P.S. You might be interested to know that other teachers actually have far more stringent rules about cell phones than I. Check out this video. I’m pretty sure it's faked, but it could inspire me change my policy again someday.

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Labels: cell phones, college students, Inbox, teaching

Posted by Didactic Pirate at 5:00 AM

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64 comments:

The Vegetable Assassin  December 8, 2010 at 5:18 AM
Dude (you should have a policy about people calling you "dude" it's really obnoxious!), if I had a class my policy would read, "Your phone goes off, your head comes off" and leave it at that. Or, "Text in my class if you enjoy having a phone wedged in your anus."

This entry made me very happy (blog entry, not the phone in anus thing). It's my opinion cell phone usage ought to be banned in classes, restaurants, public transport and anywhere I am. :)
Reply

Tim Riley  December 8, 2010 at 5:27 AM
I don't know what's worse, the phone or the mumbling when you told her to turn it off. As a teacher, I get a lot of mumblings myself, and they usually result in severe increases of my blood pressure.
Reply

Kristine  December 8, 2010 at 5:41 AM
Oh dude, I totally thought this was your actual email. Don't tell me it isn't ok? Keep the dream alive.
(You WERE be my favorite mustachioed blogger, you know.)
Reply

McGuire  December 8, 2010 at 5:41 AM
As a teacher who has had a class interrupted by a cell phone conversation conducted by a 9 year old (!!) I applaud your awesomeness and encourage you to go viral by throwing the next ringing phone against the wall. As an Ashley, however, I am NOT happy to have my moniker related to a "total slut." :)
Reply

Simple Dude  December 8, 2010 at 5:55 AM
I was about to type something about how it may be worthwhile to remind students there was a time, believe it or not, when we all didn't have cell phones at all and yet we survived. And even ones with texting capabilities didn't come along for awhile... I think I owned cell phones for at least 8 years before texting was invented.

But then I realized that makes me feel really, freakin' old. While cell phones existed while I was in college - none of us had one. They were still very expensive, and generally limited to "car phones" that you couldn't actually take with you.

And all that talk makes me feel exactly like my parents when I was a kid talking about black and white TV being a new thing, and NO (gasp) remote control.

SD
simpelledudecomplexworld.blogspot.com
Reply

Cheryl  December 8, 2010 at 6:10 AM
Unlike Simple Dude, I'm not ashamed to admit how very very old I am. I remember when we actually had A phone. We rented it from the phone company. It was a line we shared with many in our small town. Pick up the receiver and ask Sally, the operator, for a number without even dialing. Plus you never knew who's conversation you'd hear when you picked up the receiver. Kinda cool, now that I think of it.

I'll bet you can guess how hard I laughed at this whole thing.
Reply

Sara  December 8, 2010 at 6:46 AM
Love the strange alien glow. I always like to give my students a nice pantomime of how they appear to me, from the other side of the desk, when they are texting in their laps (one hand in lap, jerking up and down, look of
intense concentration on face....)

Reply

Captain Dumbass  December 8, 2010 at 7:01 AM
Dude, yer like, waaay harsh.

Reply

vicklikesfrogs  December 8, 2010 at 7:13 AM
I'm a little bit in love with you right now. In a purely platonic way, of course. Could you maybe, like, be a guest teacher at my kid's school for the next, oh, 4 or 5 years?

Reply

The Absence of Alternatives  December 8, 2010 at 7:18 AM
I am glad that you recognize a proper medical emergency when the situation calls for it. ;-) LOL.

Now, did you see this other professor? She's total badass. http://youtu.be/EgaJuPDHhek

Reply

Homemaker Man  December 8, 2010 at 7:32 AM
There is actually an in-class participation grade? I thought that was a myth. Like something teachers made up just to scare us.

Also this: "You need to understand that sometimes things happen and we have to respond because that is life."

Hilarious.

Dearest Brittany,

Thank you for the advice. I am sorry that I spoke to you the way that I did in class the way that I did.

I was merely taking cue from that one time you told Soupy that his dick should shrivel up and fall off.

Of course, we wouldn't want that to happen to your dick.

Talk about a disruption in class!

Yours

Professor Eat Me.

Reply

Anne  December 8, 2010 at 7:45 AM
this reminds me that one day when I was particulary ranty, I did tell a young man that he just "looked like he was playing with himself" when texting in his lap like that. There was momentary stunned silence on everyone's part, as we all processed whether or not I had actually said that out loud, or if the noise in my head had just gotten so loud that others could hear it. And then, you know what, people stopped texting (at least for a respectful period of time -- like, until the next class). Next to time I flipped off a student in the hallway, and the day I walked out on a class, this was almost my favorite teacher-moment. Professionalism. That's what I'm all about.

Reply

Vinny C  December 8, 2010 at 7:51 AM
I also remember a time when the human race actually existed without cell phones. Now it's gotten to the point where we have to implement laws just to keep people from texting while driving. It simply baffles me.

Reply
The Didactic Pirate: From my Inbox: One student's crusade against my cell phone policy

Toni December 8, 2010 at 8:33 AM
I sincerely hope that you really sent this email. That would make my day. :) I only have one teacher who's actually had a cell phone policy in the syllabus. And she doesn't seem to follow it very stringently. If I was in your class, I would definitely turn it off beforehand. And you'd probably still be one of my favorites.

Reply

Simon Wallett December 8, 2010 at 8:54 AM
You should show that clip at the start of each year/term under "Mobile Phone Policy" I don't think words are required.

Reply

Fortunes Fool December 8, 2010 at 9:21 AM
That might be the best response EVER written.

http://fourtunesfool.blogspot.com/

Reply

Alyssa December 8, 2010 at 9:26 AM
I suppose it works for some people--I take a different approach. Your cell phone goes off or I catch you texting, you are required to bring in treats for all of your classmates within a week. Cookies, candy, fruit, etc. And if you don't, you lose attendance and participation for that day.

That way, when a cell phone goes off, I can cheer because cookies are coming to class and everyone else is reminded to turn the damn thing off.

Reply

Ruthie December 8, 2010 at 10:18 AM
My phone has gone off in class a few times, but always because I forgot to turn off the ringer, and I quickly and shamefully silenced it. I think it even went off in your class once, and you gave me the glare. This is the proper student response.

For me, it's all about context. No distracting sound should be made, obviously, no matter what. If I text in one of the giant lecture halls, that doesn't really matter. It's not disruptive, and the professors probably can't even tell, and even if they can they don't usually care, since in giant lectures there's no real interaction between the students and professor, and usually an expected percentage of students are not actually mentally present.

But in the smaller classrooms, or even the ones with 50 students, the professor CAN tell; there IS interaction expected, and things that are glossed over in the 500-seat lectures rightfully don't fly, including whispered conversations, sleeping, and passing notes with your neighbor.

I think you should have a basket in the front of the class and make all the students put their phones in the basket before they take their seats. If they say they don't have a phone, make them turn out their pockets.

I'm also a big fan of the whole negative credit thing. If they text during class, say you will flunk them unless they turn in a three page paper. Make it PAINFUL.

But then, I'm evil like that.

Reply

SciFi Dad December 8, 2010 at 10:37 AM
This might not work for upperclassmen or technical students, but it should cover the majority of them:

1. Place a large box at the front of the class (not cardboard; something else) and ask all students place their phones - OFF - in the box. Some will, some won't.
2. Offer the box one more time, encouraging them by saying you're trying to help.

3. Close the box.

4. Take out a small remote looking device with a large button. Explain that this controls an EMP (electro-magnetic pulse) device you had installed. When they give you the confused dog (head turned to the side) look, remind them about the big red button in The Matrix that Morpheus used to disable the machines. Explain that the box is shielded, but any other phones will be irreparably damaged by the pulse.

5. Stand back as the rest of the little bastards bring up their phones.

Nicole  December 8, 2010 at 10:58 AM
I think this is my favorite DiPi post ever.
I'm with Kristine. Let's all pretend you really sent that email. So many of us are vicariously enjoying your righteous snark.

Nari  December 8, 2010 at 11:11 AM
You are my hero. I mean, the courage of defying Brittany's "favorite teacher list" in order to stand up for your principles...WOW...just wow.

Angela@BeggingTheAnswer  December 8, 2010 at 11:21 AM
LOVED your response. Honestly, can people not turn them off for one damn hour?!
You're a 19 year old college student, not a doctor on call. I agree with Ruthie...make it painful.

Didactic Pirate  December 8, 2010 at 11:35 AM
Heh. I'm loving all of you people right now.

@Vegetable Assassin: I like the whole Phone-in-Anus threat. The only problem would arise on the day someone chose to call my bluff.

@Tim: I'm with you. The snarky mumbling under the breath makes me crazy too; honestly, more so than the actual cell phone usage. I didn't know you were a teacher too!

@Kristine: Let's say I did send it. Because someday, I might. (If grow the mustache back, can I stay your favorite? Cuz I'll do it. I'm sort of whorish like that.)

@McGuire: 9-year-olds should NOT have cell phones. You and I must make a pact to not give our kids phones until they're at least 13. Or 33. P.S. You know you're my favorite non-slutty Ashley, of course.

@Simple Dude: I've tried to avoid lobbing out some of those "When I was your age..." remarks, to keep from feeling old myself. But it's getting harder to restrain myself as the years pass.

@Cheryl: Sally the operator! I love the whole Mayberry-esque idea of that. Simpler days, better days.

@Sara: I do the same thing. And I tell them that if they're NOT using a phone when they're doing that, I probably don't want to know.

@Captain Dumbass: Yer damn right. Beware my wrath.

Wow...the things this says about our generation. And maybe yours too, now that I think about it. At what point in time did the argument that "sometimes things happen and we have to respond because that is life" even make
sense? What a fast world we live in now!

But wow, I loved your response. :D I thought it was very kind of you to go through the whole story for her, complete with your characteristic humor and irony but also with your reasoning. And well done for reminding her that you are still open to comments, even though this one didn't go through! Hope is the greatest of treasures, as Terry Pratchett says.

Reply

Dad U  December 8, 2010 at 11:57 AM
LOL (or sigh, I'm not sure which)
Reply

Alicia  December 8, 2010 at 12:01 PM
I bow down to you. I once caught a student watching a portable DVD player (it was Scary Movie 2) in a backpack. This was in a small classroom with only 14 students - a high school classroom). He was incensed that I turned the DVD player over to the Dean. That's balls. My response was more like "too bad, so sad." Yours was much better.
Reply

Kev D.  December 8, 2010 at 12:16 PM
Seriously what the hell is wrong with these kids these days? If you really need to be that accessible at ALL TIMES just skip class and drop out. Then you can sit in your parents' basement all day long and keep in touch with everyone all the time forever. On like facebook, or whatever.

EMERGENCIES don't come in text form.
Reply

Didactic Pirate  December 8, 2010 at 12:40 PM
@vickilikesfrogs: Give me ten minutes in your kid's class, and I'll change their lives. (I love making with the BIG talk, don't I?)

@Absence of Alternatives: I love her! That clip is way better than the one I posted. There's a whole subgenre of teachers freaking out on YouTube. It's only a matter of time before I show up in some clip. Aw, crap.

@Homemaker Man: Yes. Her "life happens" comment was one of my favorite parts too. I like your response. Succinct, clear, and sure to provoke fear.

@Anne: Flipping off a student in the hallway places you firmly in the Fucking Awesome category. I love it.

@Vinny C: You should see students driving into my school in the mornings. They all seem to be texting. I have no idea how they're not wrapping their cars around telephones.

@Toni: I seriously wish I didn't have to have a policy at all. But at this point, I have no choice. *sigh*

@Simon Wallett: I like that idea. I'm thinking of going to an electronic syllabus next year, which means the opportunity include clips like that one. And several more of teaching wigging out in classrooms.

@Fortunes Fool: Thanks, FF.

@Alyssa: I love the idea of that. In fact, I think my students should be required to feed me on a regular basis throughout the semester. It's the least they can do.
Reply

Kimber Leszczuk.  December 8, 2010 at 1:06 PM
As a returning student I am shocked at how my fellow classmates behave sometimes.

I turn my cell phone off before class anyways regardless of whether there is a policy or not. I am there to learn. Why on earth would I want to waste the thousands of dollars I am paying for the classes I am taking for a call or
text that can be returned at my convenience later?

In one of my classes the girl next to me wasn't even taking notes on her laptop she was online gaming. My husband said this is common in classes these days. He said one group of guys were networked to each other gaming through a class and one stood up and yelled, "You got me killed motherfucker." in the middle of one of his classes.

All I can say is I am glad this is my competition for grad school. It should make things much easier. :)

Reply

Kage December 8, 2010 at 1:06 PM

oh snap! (...or whatever). your letter to brittney is the funniest shit i have ever read in my LIFE.

i wish you were my teacher. i'd EAT my phone.

actually...what i wish is that i were in your class, and that i wrote you a stupid letter, and got some gold like THAT in return. twas a work of art.

i'd post it on my own blog.

pis.s. what color nail polish IS on for next weekend?

Reply

James (SeattleDad) December 8, 2010 at 1:45 PM

Classic. One can only hope that you actually sent her that response.

Reply

Nicki December 8, 2010 at 2:12 PM

Dear Prof. Didactic Pirate,

We pay a lot of money to go to this school and party every weekend and ask to hand in our papers late and rampantly plagiarize and sleep in and show up hungover and forget our books and write passive aggressive emails to our professors about their cell phone policies, and teachers like you do not make it easier.

But you sure do make it funnier.

Cheers,

Nicki

Reply

Deidra December 8, 2010 at 2:27 PM

"The fact is, I did not intend to use my phone during class but I received a very important text from my boyfriend about a personal matter that I needed to respond to right away because he and I going through a hard time right now. You need to understand that sometimes things happen and we have to respond because that is life. I know that rules are rules but I think you were very disrespectful of me when you spoke to me the way you did in front of the entire class in the way that you did. Before today you were of my favorite teachers here but after your this I am sorry but I will have to rethink that belief."

This entire portion of the email had me practically shaking my head in disbelief. Girl sounds like a sulking ten-year-old.

She "didn't intend" to use her phone during class? So it was an accident, then? Her fingers just kind of fell on the keys? Either it was intentional or it wasn't.

If the boyfriend can't wait for her to get out of class to reply to a text, you're dam straight they're "going through a rough time", because he's a douchebag that doesn't care about her future or her education, obviously.

And I can't even dissect the rest, because it's worded too childishly for me to comprehend.

I take personal pride in the fact that I have NEVER texted someone during class.
Reply

Deidra  December 8, 2010 at 2:28 PM

*personal

I also take pride in my spelling skills.

Reply

Annah  December 8, 2010 at 2:39 PM

EPIC! :) :) :)  

Also... that last video did it for me. FAB!

Reply

Shorty  December 8, 2010 at 3:00 PM

Cell phone policies are SO necessary, I think, and yet SO difficult to keep. I work in a university library and we recently changed our "no cell phones" policy to "phones allowed in green areas, blue areas are silent." So far it seems to be working better than the previous policy, but still we get hundreds of complaints that so-and-so is too loud or the green area is too close the blue area or the famous "you can't tell me where to use my phone." Personally, I LOVE how the professor's handled it in the video! :)

Reply

Sunny  December 8, 2010 at 3:21 PM

I'm going to concur with the others on the fantasticness of this post. If indeed you decide to hit 'send' and humor dear Britney with a reply, let me know so I can give you a gold star. You'd officially be my new favorite pirate superhero (it's kinda like a supermodel, only BETTER). But enough with the lighthearted lollygagging. If I may, I'd like to offer a suggestion in modifying your approach regarding the specifics of your cell phone policy as it relates to your pupils.

You see, as I read, my eyes gravitated to your use of "don't," and in response, I must confess, the word stung a little. As a public educator who *proudly* helps mold the youth of today into the leaders of tomorrow, I feel qualified to explain that this generation of youngsters are very very delicate, Mr. Pirate. These young adults are not used to this concept of "do not" for which you vigilantly advocate.

Your repeated "don't" use struck me as being somewhat akin to the dreaded "red pen," once used by zealous teachers during my formative years. A tool used for the dual purpose of both grading papers AND ruining students' self worth. Harsh as it sounds, that was how teachers rolled in my day. No wonder I have confidence issues today. (I mean, hello?!) Not only did they use blood red ink to judge my shortcomings, they also did it by indicating how many items I did incorrectly; instead of highlighting my awesome item correctness - never mind how meager the number and percentage may have been.

Luckily though, the pendulum of educational paradigms switched just in time to cushion the newest batch of learners from the devastation of red ink. Oh, and you know what else they've been blessedly protected from? Yes, if you answered "don't," you'd be right! You see, don't is not a positive notion. And 'round these here halls of public education, we prefer to keep it affirmative, my friend. Especially at schools abundant with entitled, neurotic, well-to-do parents...but I digress.

Back to my point. Perhaps your students do not compute this proposed negative concept of yours. Perhaps, their collective inner dialog sounds like a befuddled Scooby Doo (think: "errrr...rut??") upon each utterance of the word, and in turn, they simply cannot conceive of your directive.

So, I'd like to suggest reframing your prompt in a manner more in line with their experiences reinforced by the public sector of education for which I "proudly" (I mean, "proudly") serve. Don't submerge your delicate neophytes into the dark world of negative abstraction by pairing "don't" with their beloved mobile devices. No, no, dear pirate. Instead, you must always put your requests into a positive form.

If I may, I'd like to illustrate: Hey!!! DON'T THINK OF A PIZZA!!!!

Tell me, did an image of pizza pop into your mind? Cheese maybe? Breadsticks perhaps?
Yes, that is because the mind cannot conceive purely in terms of negation. It must first process the forbidden act, then conceptualize its opposite. And considering how little practice they get in schools nowadays, you may as well be speaking Greek to your budding savants!

In closing, I encourage you to consider my words in light of young Brittany's heartfelt appeal. Poor lil lamb probably didn't know what hit her when you came at her with all your boundaries and behavioral negations.

Let Brittany thrive, sir. Speak to her in a language she knows. Let her know what you DO expect her and her cohorts to do. Illustrate for them in positive terms, what learning "looks like." Your instructions may still be a thorn in the side of her fragile relationship with her man, but at least her self esteem, confidence, and personal entitlement will remain well in tact.

Reply

ZenMom December 8, 2010 at 3:42 PM
I heart you so hard right now.

“Shoulder Devil” Send it. You know you want to. ;)

Reply

Kim December 8, 2010 at 4:13 PM
Hilarious! I teach high school, and these kids have raised hidden cell phone use to a fine art. My best tool: "OK, take out your cell phones. Put them on silent. Place them screen-side down on the desk in front of you. If you touch the phone, you get a zero."

Mostly it's an anti-cheating tool. If they get stuck on a question, I know they aren't sneaking off to the bathroom to look up the answer online. Also, I learned this lesson in my first year of teaching when a whole slew of students had the answer key to one version of the final exam (thanks, Ernie, for your Swiss cheese test security) on their cell phones. Huh, go figure, some of those students now attend UCF!

Reply

Beta Dad December 8, 2010 at 4:49 PM
You're a better man than I, DiPi. When I taught high school, I would fight the plague of cell phones in class. But high school was all fighting and not much teaching.

When I started teaching college classes, I kind of figured, "well, they (or their parents) paid to come here, who am I to keep them from wasting their time and money." If people disrupt other students who are paying attention, I'll go after them. And I'll be happy to embarrass the hell out of them by asking a question when I know they're not paying attention (although this sometimes backfires because many students don't find this situation shameful at all--a topic for another conversation). But I just can never muster the nerve to confront someone directly about cell phone abuse in a way designed to make a lesson out of the situation. I guess I'm afraid to be dropped off of the "favorite teacher" list.

Reply

ThePeachy1 December 8, 2010 at 5:36 PM
Dear Brittany.

As a grown woman who has worked professionally the majority of her life and has a daughter that's a SR in College I write to you with all the understanding in the world. I want to point out some motherly things to you. It's very clear you a special precious snowflake by the letter you wrote to your Teacher. It is also clear that you have your head somewhat detached from reality. That's ok it happens and your still a precious snowflake.

Now as a professional woman to a young college woman.

Shut up you twit. Seriously? I can promise you that NOTHING some twit that you are "having problems with" your freshman year in college texts you constitutes an emergency. An emergency is a child with a broken arm while you are in a board meeting. A parent with a heart attack when you are on a conference call. Get your head out of your butt if YOU are indeed the one footing the bill for this education then stop wasting your (parents) money by texting during a class. Also suck ups like you with your half hearted "favorite teacher" quote, will get eaten in corporate america, so I hope your headed for something artistic or political. Now get off the phone you idiot and do YOUR job. Learn.

Reply

dbs December 8, 2010 at 7:34 PM
Brittany sounds delightfully passive-aggressive to me. Hmm. Perhaps this is at the root of her personal issues.
However, it wouldn't explain why she's such a Grade A twit. DISRESPECT is DISRESPECT. There's NO excuse!

**worthy9** December 8, 2010 at 7:52 PM

EXCELLENT BROTHER ...

& THE WHOLE CONCEPT OF A VALUABLE LESSON ON OFFER IN THE REWARDS OF HAVING A PHONE FREE TIMEOUT IN THE DAY SHOULDN'T BE UNDERRATED ALSO PERHAPS ! PLAINLY YOU HAVE THE HIGHGROUND MY MAN ...

PERHAPS THE FORCE OF YOUR SELF DEFENCE/ VALIDATION WAS A LITTLE O.T.T. - A LITTLE GRACELESS?

WEILDING YOUR SUBSTANTIAL INTELLECT LIKE THE MASSIVE CLUB IT (PLAINLY) CAN BE ... TO SWAT A MIDGE (SANDFLIES WE CALL THEM HERE IN AUS.)

BUT F--K SORRY I PRESUME TO JUDGE.

YOU ARE PLAINLY , JUST FROM STARTING TO READ YOUR POSTS,(THE FIRST WAS ABOUT THE WHY OF BLOGGING) WHICH INCIDENTALLY HAVE INSPIRED ME TO COMMIT TO A DAILY BLOG NOW , AFTER JOINING YEARS AGO AND LETTING IT SLIDE, A GOOD TEACHER.... STILL CURIOUS AND STILL TALKING TO YOUR HEART - THE 2 MUSTHAAVES FOR ME ALWAYS ! LOOK FORWARD TO MORE

TAKE CARE J.

**Anonymous** December 8, 2010 at 8:34 PM

I think that your reaction is quite understandable, however posting one of your student's emails is unprofessional and I think grounds of a warning from your university. You stress that you are eager for feedback from your students yet you post a direct email from your student onto your blog? You aren't exactly promoting what you say you are eager for. As a student, I'm highly disgusted in your decision to post her email. I think it would have been more proper if you had paraphrased the email and then go on your rant that you just had to have.

On another note, I agree with your cellphone policy and even to what you said to Brittany. Students often need a "dose of their own medicine" in order to even semi-grasp a concept.

Also, I am not posting as anonymous in order to conceal my identity, rather I do not have any of the options they offer for me to post this comment.

Kara

**Didactic Pirate** December 8, 2010 at 9:54 PM

@Kara Anonymous: I appreciate your comment, and I think you post a good point. I've spent a lot of time thinking about what's appropriate to post on this blog, when I write about teaching. On the one hand, I don't want to violate a student's privacy. On the other hand, I think stories from the trenches of academia are worth writing about, particularly to learn more about how both teachers and students grapple with classroom issues.

The issue in this post is how cell phone usage is creating new dynamics between students and teachers, and how teachers themselves are trying to adapt to changing social rules. But obviously, I tend to write snarky about most issues.

Do be aware of the following, though:

1) I changed the student's name, of course.
2) Before posting this email, I went through it and took out anything in the text that could remotely reveal the student's identity. In other words, it isn't a direct email. While I did keep some of the verbiage from her original message, there's a lot of paraphrasing here, as you suggested I do in the first place.
3) My response to the student here isn't what I actually sent to her. As you point out, it's a rant. And probably a passive-aggressive one.

Again, I appreciate your comment.
Stephanie C @ Seriously?? Really? Seriously? December 8, 2010 at 11:57 PM
Dear Pirate,

I was new to this blog and was hesitant about it's greatness, with a header asking for extra credit and all, but I will now have to rethink that belief.

*chuckles while blowing the Pirate's mind*

Reply

Cecelia Winesap December 9, 2010 at 7:23 AM
Seriously???? I cannot believe the balls of these kids... and I'm only a few years older than them. Who raised these people?

Reply

TwoBusy December 9, 2010 at 8:30 AM
This is one of the greatest goddamn things I've ever read.

Reply

Steam Me Up, Kid December 9, 2010 at 10:45 AM
This is why I hate young people.

Plus? I can't believe she knocked you off her favorite teachers list. Are you okay? That's gotta sting.

Reply

otherworldlyone December 9, 2010 at 11:32 AM
Sigh. It is such a shame that you're married.

Reply

Anonymous December 9, 2010 at 11:37 AM
Didactic Pirate,
I was not aware about these changes you made within your blog and I'm glad that you responded. Thank you for replying and like I said, I agree with everything you said. She sounds highly annoying and I do not blame you for posting what you did. From what I've experienced at my college, I think you were actually polite to her. Usually my professors call the person out and talk about how rude it is for approximately three minutes or make them leave the classroom for that day. I think you should start deducting from their grade because I think that would solve the problem unless they truly are stupid.
Kara

Reply

Eric December 9, 2010 at 1:46 PM
Win!

Reply

Marsi White December 9, 2010 at 2:43 PM
Steve has to read this one....I sent him a link. Love it!

Reply

Jack December 9, 2010 at 3:24 PM
Ok, I am really freaking old because this wouldn't have been a problem when I was in school.
Secondly, I am often shocked by the sense of entitlement that so many people feel today. Just because you can do something doesn't mean you should.

Plunder their grades dear pirate and make them understand that there is a price to be paid for breaking the rules.

Reply

Kold Kadavr flattliner December 9, 2010 at 3:34 PM

You're an eff'n English teacher!!! Kick. Some. Ass!!! Betcha those Tex-Mexs think you're the bomb. Couldn't ever do without English, dude (I put 'withose', 'witheer', 'withat', etc - more simplified, easier2comprehend. Being a kick-ass English teach and all HeeHee Teach that tomorrow? The 'withose' and see how your students like'm - there's ANOTHER one of my ONOMONOPEA words) --- Nevertheless, I have provided a 'semi-colon' to help U.S. halt this madness. Here's EIGHT blogs YOU may steal/plagiarize to thy heart's content (don't find that very off'n, doya? Just like to give my piece of cranium to the world); be warned, however: Upstairs in Heaven Above, all of my EIGHT blogs of wisdom and avant-garde-efficaciousness will be attributed to moi, aussi. Though, I don't think you'll care one-way-or-the-other in the Great Beyond. God bless.

Reply

Fragrant Liar December 9, 2010 at 4:59 PM

Once again, Brittany shows she has balls a-plenty, even for her fave teach. It's kinda like she gave you an apple. Right?

Reply

PJ Mullen December 10, 2010 at 6:42 PM

Wow. I could not be a teacher. My cell phone policy would be a sign at the entrance stating that any that phone not turned off will be seized, crushed and recycled.

Reply

lex [lexinthecity] December 12, 2010 at 4:01 PM

Dearest Didactic Pirate:
Thank you!!! I'm only 25 and so we had cell phones when I was in high school and college but kids didn't start having the balls to text or answer calls in class until I was graduating college. I have had to have my phone on me for legit emergencies but I told the teacher ahead of time. They were fine with that and I never used my cell otherwise. If you ever do amend it again, I would say add that. But I'm sure Brittany would be telling you that she had a daily emergency. Also, people like Brittany also bring their cell phones to work. I had to wait for a guy at Starbucks to finish texting before I could get my latte.
So to end my mini rant, I think there needs to be an etiquette class in high school, mandatory.

Thoughts?

Reply

chksngr December 14, 2010 at 11:58 AM

I need to borrow this and add it to rules of order for my meetings.

Reply

Not the Hero December 15, 2010 at 5:11 PM

I taught one semester at a trades school teaching proces piping design. Now I'm rather young to be teaching but I went with it anyway. A lot of my students were actually older than I am. Now that being said I have a good idea how their minds work. My cell phone policy wasn't nearly as severe as that. If you must use your cell phone use it outside of the class room. Leave as quietly as possible. It shouldn't be any more disruptive than a trip to the bathroom. However if you leave my class room You are responsible for the material missed. I didn't cover anything twice. Especially if it was because a student left the class room. If a phone went off during an exam, or I saw you texting it was an instant zero.

I only ever had one student answer his phone in my classroom. I asked if I could speak to the caller. It happened to be the students Girlfriend. I informed her that phoning him when he was in class cost him his attendance marks.
for that class and lost his extension on an assignment.

I like making up consequences on the spot. If the class happened to be a work period I didn’t care.

However I do like being snarky with my students and I loved that email. The only difference is I would have sent it. Probably a good reason I’m not teaching anymore.

On another note. I have supreme respect for any teacher. I couldn’t handle it and went back to the professional side of my industry.

Lyla  December 18, 2010 at 1:59 AM
If words could kill that girl would have been slaughtered by now.. don’t get me wrong, I loved your reply :) the way you described her made me feel that she had it coming but I would like to make one suggestion..

If I were a teacher I would make a policy that students can keep their cell phones turned on during the class but they should be kept on silent.. but if they knowingly didn’t turn off the ring tone before entering the class and it rang then the student should better spend the rest of the semester outside where s/he can talk freely without interruption.. though forgetting to turn off the phone should not be punished as severely.. on the other hand you should not stop them from texting if they want to because you can only bring the horse to water, can’t make him drink.. if they are interested in learning, they will otherwise if you force them to comply then they might look like they are paying attention but for all you know they might be trading players of their fantasy football league in their heads...

P.S I am not a teacher, just a grad student but I do know a little bit about how the mind of your average student works.. :)

andy koopmans  December 18, 2010 at 1:56 PM
I quit teaching before cell phones became a problem, which is probably good because I would LOSE MY SHIT. It’s just an avenue of disrespect for the teacher, for the other students, and for the learning environment.

leebodenmiller  December 21, 2010 at 9:55 PM
The other day when I was teaching someone was texting and they must have accidentally pushed the wrong button because their phone said, "Say command" to which I responded in a loud authoritative voice, "Turn Off!" .. and then I thought of this post that I had read a while back! Great post!

Writer Ninja  December 24, 2010 at 6:01 PM
Arrggg. I agree with you 100% and I love the snark in your letter. :) In all seriousness though, it is not only disrespect for the teachers, but for the students as well. And this is coming from a young person who has had to watch a certain Joe Blow text his girlfriend nonstop. It is annoying as hell.